

O N T H E

RESOLUTIONS OF THE PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

At their late Meeting at STOWMARKET, in SUFFOLK.

THE Protestant Dissenters having entered into a confederacy, in opposition to the present *municipal laws*, or laws by which persons *hold offices of trust* in this kingdom; with such declarations as tend to abridge the freedom of voting in Parliament, and disturb the public peace; We beg leave to offer a few observations on the principles they profess, and the measures they have adopted, as they have opened them to the public in their late *Resolutions at Stowmarket*.

In the beginning of this Century, when parties ran high, under the Reigns of Queen Anne and George the First, they were distinguished by the names of *high Church* and *low Church*; but the times are changed; and the Dissenters now come forward on the new ground of Scepticism and Infidelity; the former of which is adverse to all authority in Government, as the object of the latter is to destroy the Church. Clergymen will naturally consult for the security of our Religion; but the Laity are here equally concerned, for the safety of the State, and the freedom of the House of Commons. The first Resolution of the Dissenters of Suffolk is as follows.

I. *That Liberty, Civil and Religious, is the unalienable right of every good citizen.*

R E M A R K.

Religious liberty consists in worshipping God according to our consciences. This Liberty the Dissenters enjoy to the full, without any disturbance. *Civil Liberty* is a liberty under the restraints of law, and can be no other, in any civil society. A liberty of *being trusted*, (which is here intended) is a liberty which does not exist, because by the constitution of every country, it must depend upon *approved qualifications*, which the Government is to fix for its own security, on the universal Principle of self-defence.

II. *That when perfect liberty is enjoyed all good citizens of every denomination of religion, are uncontrouled in their sentiments, writings, and modes of worship; and equally eligible in point of right to all offices of trust, honour, and emolument.*

R E M A R K.

Citizens may be *good men*, without being *good citizens*; because in a civil sense no man is *good* but he who submits to the Laws, and has legal qualifications. It is no reflection upon a Protestant Dissenter, to say he is not *good* in this sense, and so not *equally eligible in point of right*: for there is no right in civil society where there is not the qualification required by law. We think, moreover, that there is not the right of equity, in the present case; because Protestant Dissenters who left the *Religion established*, and the *offices of trust* which go along with it, took liberty of *conscience* as an *equivalent*; and, therefore, cannot, consistently with justice, claim *both*; for then they would be better off than their fellow-subjects, yea even than the King himself, who cannot hold his Crown without conforming to the Religion established.

III. *That the Protestant Dissenters of this realm hold no principles inimical to the peace and order of society, but are confessedly loyal and deserving subjects.*

R E M A R K,

The word *loyal* is applicable only to those who are voluntarily subject to the *laws*, and well affected to the constitution. Now as the State and the Church are here united into one constitution, and the safety of both depends upon their union, it is not possible the Dissenters should be *loyal*, that is, well affected to the constitution. Their present attempt demonstrates the contrary; and we suppose it is not forgotten, how lately the King, and the two Houses of Parliament, and the property of the nation, were all brought into imminent danger, at the time of the riots in London, when many thousands of disorderly people were headed by a person of the Dissenting persuasion. Whether or not, any of the present popular writers among the Dissenters were secret abettors of that confusion, we do not take upon us to say: but that the revolt of America was promoted by their avowed writings is undeniable.

IV. *That*

IV. *That by the Corporation and Test Acts they have long been deprived of an important and unquestionable civil right, viz. that of being eligible to serve their King and country in many offices of public utility, and confidence; and, by proscription, are branded with a mark of infamy, and exposed to severe penalties, as dangerous foes to the State.*

R E M A R K.

When a man *forfeits a right* by his own choice, it is improper to say he is *deprived of it*. This is the case with the Dissenters, who take liberty of conscience instead of the qualifications required by the Laws, and they cannot forfeit their right, and have their right at the same time. There is no expression in the Laws, that we know of, which *brands* Protestant Dissenters *with infamy*: nor doth it follow, that because a man is not *selected and rewarded*, he is, therefore, branded with infamy; for if that were true, the Church abounds with honest men, who are to be accounted infamous, because they are not preferred and exalted. If we, of the Church, do not look upon the Dissenters as infamous by their profession, which we are far from doing, why should they throw out such words as, with unwary readers, may bring suspicion upon themselves?

V. *That by these acts, an ordinance of the Christian Religion, instituted by its Divine Founder, solely with a spiritual view, is shamefully prostituted to civil purposes, and made, oftentimes, to the irreligious and profane, a meer passport to posts of secular power, dignity and profit.*

R E M A R K.



From the abuse of any thing against the use of it, there lies no argument. For the safety of the State, it should be known *what Church* a man is of. We are to suppose he is of that, with which he freely communicates; and the Law leaves the act as spiritual as before. It is only the wickedness of self-interested men, which perverts the use of it, as it doth of *Oaths*; without the security of which, society cannot be carried on; and he who trifles with an Oath (as is to be feared, thousands of profane people do) may be in as great danger as the unspiritual communicant. Dissenters have been known to make as *profane a passport* of the Sacrament, as other people; and their temporizing in this matter, made it necessary to pass a Bill in the year 1711 against *occasional conformity*: in which practice some of their friends defended them, while others, on whom they most depended, forsook them.

VI. *That feeling our rights as citizens, and our obligations as Christians, we are determined to adopt every constitutional measure apparently calculated to procure the repeal of these acts, with firmness and perseverance.*

R E M A R K.

We do not see how it can consist with the laws, or agree with the safety of any constitution, that *committees* should form themselves for *civil purposes*, without a *commission* from the Government under which they live. We judge this a breach of the peace, to which *liberty of conscience in Religion* does not extend; and we think it of very dangerous tendency, that men should form themselves into one body, *throughout the Nation*, with design to act *against the Laws*. If the English Constitution is defective in this respect, they who are *with the laws* must purchase what security they can for themselves by a *similar Association of the different Counties and Dioceses*; and this measure should be *strongly recommended*, and *seasonably entered upon*, with *firmness and perseverance*.

VII. *That at an æra distinguished for its liberal and enlightened sentiments, when we behold a neighbouring nation, which has long groaned under a most arbitrary government, as with one voice asserting the rights of equal liberty, and nobly sacrificing the prejudices of religion and habits of despotic rule, to the claims of reason and humanity; and when even Roman Catholics are freely declaring, that diversity of religious opinion is no bar to a mutual participation of all the privileges of society; we cannot but hope that in a nation, long priding itself in an unrivalled attachment to justice and liberty, our moderate expectations will not be disappointed.*

R E M A R K.

The state of affairs in France is here much misrepresented, and a miserable *spectacle of Anarchy* is held forth as a pattern of *light and liberty*. The liberty there prevailing was invented by *Infidels and Atheists*: and Catholics submit to it, not by choice, but *by necessity*: How a *mutual participation of privileges* can subsist, where the Clergy are deprived of their Tithes, held by chartered right from the first ages of Christianity, we do not understand. When one man robs another of half his possessions, it may be said that there is a *mutual participation*; but the words thus applied, are terms of mockery. If the Government in England is already free, the proceedings of men under the despotic Government of France can be no fit example for us to follow.

VIII. *That*